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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

21 December 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: An Appraisal of Soviet Intentions

1. In pursuing their struggle against the West, the Soviet leaders follow a strategy which they call "peaceful coexistence." By this they declare their intention to wage a persistent and aggressive campaign by a variety of means -- propaganda and political pressure, military threat, economic and scientific competition, subversion and internal war -- aimed at the victory of their cause on a world scale. The new aspect in Khrushchev's formulation of Soviet foreign policy is the explicit proposition that general war is an unacceptable means of prosecuting this struggle. Unlike Stalin, he has founded Soviet policy on the belief that the "imperialists" can be forced into final submission by a steady undermining of their world position and that, during this process, Soviet military power will deter them from a resort to arms.

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2. This is but one of a series of innovations which Khrushchev has sponsored in the total range of Communist internal and foreign policies. His revisions of doctrine and practice have frequently been radical in Communist terms, and they have not gone unopposed within the Soviet party and the international movement. The XXII Congress was the scene of a great effort by Khrushchev, using the most dramatic means available to him, to make these policies binding, both at home and abroad. This effort embraced domestic, Bloc, and foreign problems, and while the main lines of the peaceful coexistence strategy have been firmly reasserted, crucial questions have been raised concerning the Soviet Party's commanding role in world communism. The course of political controversy within the Soviet Party, and more importantly, of the mounting tensions in Soviet relations with China will obviously have a significant bearing on the conduct of Soviet relations with the non-Communist world.

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Internal Problems

3. We believe that Khrushchev has not had to fear for his position since his victory over the so-called antiparty group in 1957. Despite this victory, however, and despite the cult which subsequently developed around his own personality, he has continually met with difficulties within the party, and on two counts. In the first place, in the past year or two other high level leaders appear to have succeeded in limiting the revisions which he wished to make in economic priorities (greater benefits for the consumer) and military policy (downgrading conventional forces and traditional doctrine). In the second place, Khrushchev has found the party apparatus which he inherited a far from satisfactory instrument for carrying out his numerous reforms. The great majority of party officials were trained in the Stalinist period to execute mechanically orders from above and to regard the population as recalcitrant and untrustworthy subjects. They have tended to become bewildered, resentful, and concerned for their careers as Khrushchev demands of them that they display initiative, elicit it from others, and draw the masses into a positive identification with the regime and active support of its policies.

4. The savage attack upon Stalin was meant, in the domestic context, to break the emotional attachment to Stalin's person and methods which still exists in the Soviet Party. It was also meant to discredit certain Stalinist dogmas, such as the proposition that heavy industry must at all times grow faster than light industry, which had become imbedded in Soviet ideology and stood in the way of Khrushchev's reforms. The concurrent blackening of the antiparty group served to dramatize the penalties of resisting Khrushchev's demands for a new style of work and to destroy any luster which the unrepentant and still argumentative Molotov retains as a "conservative" spokesman among the middle and lower reaches of the apparatus.

5. The full internal consequences of the Congress will be a long time in working themselves out. Certainly Khrushchev has succeeded in putting his stamp upon the present era and establishing a direct succession to Lenin. The present compromise formulations of economic and defense policy, however, indicate that his programs remain subject to some sort of consensus among the top leaders, who share his general outlook but cannot be equated to the terrorized yesmen around Stalin. Remaking the entire party apparatus in Khrushchev's own image will, we believe,

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continue to be a long and difficult process. And among critically-minded elements of Soviet society -- the youth, the cultural intelligentsia, perhaps even younger party members -- virtually the whole of Soviet history has been brought into question, and along with it the activities of present party leaders during that period. We doubt that the attack on Stalin and the cult of Khrushchev will strengthen belief in the party's claim to wisdom and the right of absolute leadership. These factors are more likely to work in the long run toward a weakening of the propositions on which party rule is based, and to complicate the problems which Khrushchev's successors must face.

Bloc Politics

6. The consequences of the Congress for Bloc relations are much more immediate and far-reaching. With his surprise attack upon the proxy target of Albania, Khrushchev made his third attempt (the Bucharest meeting in June 1960, the Moscow Conference later in the year) to repulse the Chinese Communist challenge to Soviet leadership. In doing so, he chose a time of great Chinese weakness. He also gave his attack the greatest possible force, short of an explicit challenge, by coupling it

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with the condemnation of Stalinist principles and practices in the sharpest form. He intended by this to force the Chinese to choose between submitting and being openly condemned as deviationist. Yet in the ensuing two months Peiping, while withholding an equally dramatic response, has made clear its determination to hold to its positions. It appears that a showdown of historic proportions may be imminent.

7. For Soviet policy, this is but the latest in a long series of problems arising from the Soviet leaders' inability to reconcile the contradiction between the force of nationalism and their own insistence upon Soviet hegemony over world communism. For the Sino-Soviet conflict is at bottom a clash of national interests. While each professes devotion to Communist unity, each seeks to mobilize the entire world Communist movement in the service of its own aims. The ideological element, far from providing a basis for reconciliation, imparts a special bitterness and intensity to this rivalry.

8. As the lines are now drawn, it seems unlikely that the dispute can be papered over by a compromise along the lines of last December's 81-party conference. Economic relations have

been substantially reduced, and military cooperation, never very high, is minimal. The entire Communist world has been made aware of the deep differences between the two, and each is vigorously using all the weapons of pressure and persuasion to hold and enlarge its retinue of supporters. At the least, it appears certain that full harmony cannot be restored. Yet the question of whether the two powers, poised now on the brink of an overt break in party relations, take this final step remains an important one. So long as they do not, the way remains open for a return to tolerable cooperation and a surface appearance of unity, and the strains on other parties can be kept within manageable proportions. If they do, the resulting hostility would be more profound and probably longer lasting than that which divided the Yugoslavs from the Communist camp after 1948, and few Communist regimes or parties would escape its effects.

9. From their present behavior, it appears that both parties are able to contemplate this possibility. Each still hopes that the other will in the last analysis make the concessions necessary to avoid a final split, but neither seems prepared to retreat on the fundamental issue of the locus of authority over world

communism. At this moment, a trial of strength is occurring in the Soviet campaign to bring down the Albanian leaders; success here would deal a major blow to Chinese pretensions and to any inclinations in other parties to escape Soviet domination. We believe that the odds are against Moscow in this campaign, but even if it succeeds, the present Chinese leadership would almost certainly return to the lists.

10. In appraising Sino-Soviet relations, we have regularly stressed the great benefits of a close alliance to the national interests of both partners and, conversely, the great losses which each would suffer from a true rupture. Yet the record of the past 18 months shows a consistent refusal, on the part of the Soviets, to limit their authority in matters of general Communist policy. Over the same period, the Chinese have persistently proven unwilling to remain content with the role which the Soviets would assign them in the movement. Barring a radical change in Chinese outlook or leadership, we now believe that the chances of a full break in party relations between the two during the next year or so have increased very substantially.

11. Should such a break occur, the logic of ideological conflict and the history of Communist parties everywhere make it likely that the result would be an acrimonious and protracted struggle. Each side would be impelled to proclaim itself the repository of doctrinal truth and to call for the overthrow of the competing leadership. Communists everywhere would be pressed to declare themselves; purges and splits would probably occur in many parties; some, especially those in Asia, might eventually align themselves with the Chinese.

12. In these circumstances, the military alliance between the USSR and Communist China would in effect become inoperative. The Chinese probably already consider it of dubious value; they probably do not feel able any longer to count on full Soviet support in the event that they become embroiled in military hostilities with the US.

13. The Soviet and Chinese leaders may still find some way to get past the current tensions. Even if they do, we believe that the result will be an uneasy and distrustful truce, marked by cooperation at various times and places and by competition at

others. In short, we believe that the Sino-Soviet relationship rests upon an unstable foundation, and that a breach, if it is avoided for the present, will remain in the foreground as a continuing possibility.

Foreign Policy

14. A central problem in Sino-Soviet contention has been policy toward the non-Communist world. This has involved a great deal of misrepresentation on both sides. Thus Khrushchev's allegation that the Chinese regard general war as either inevitable or desirable, while a telling argument insofar as he can make it convincing, is not true. Similarly, Chinese charges that Khrushchev's strategy of peaceful coexistence is a denial of revolutionary aims are a gross exaggeration, although the zeal with which Molotov's parallel criticisms were attacked at the Congress suggests that this indictment finds considerable resonance in the Soviet and other parties.

15. The peaceful coexistence line, far from being an abandonment of Soviet expansionist goals, is a tactical prescription considerably more effective than the compound of heavy-handedness and isolationism which was Stalin's foreign policy.

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It is informed by an appreciation of the manifold opportunities presented by all the great strains and disharmonies of the non-Communist world -- national rivalry, colonialism, the desire for economic development, the yearning for peace and disarmament. Peaceful coexistence seeks to capture these sentiments and turn them against the "imperialist" states, using all the weapons of political struggle, economic assistance, and subversion, and underlining its points with demonstrations of Soviet military, scientific, and economic prowess.

✓ 16. At the same time, this policy also embraces the proposition that general nuclear war would bring intolerable damage upon the USSR itself and should therefore be avoided. The Soviets are continuing to develop their already formidable defense establishment. But the programs presently underway do not reflect a belief that it is possible to achieve a decisive advantage over the West, one which would permit them to launch general war with assurance of success at some acceptable cost. Rather, what we know of these programs, and of Soviet strategic thinking as well, suggests that the Soviet leaders are aiming in

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the first instance at a capability large enough to deter a Western resort to general war.

17. The Soviets apparently believe that they have already in large measure achieved this end. But they recognize that the forward policies which they wish to pursue involve some element of risk, and that they may not always be able to control these risks. In building their forces, they are probably seeking an offensive nuclear capability large enough, not only to deter their opponent, but also to bring under attack those elements of Western striking power and national strength which can be effectively attacked by ICBMs and other long-range delivery systems. On the defensive side, in addition to improving their defenses against manned bombers and cruise-type missiles, they are exerting major efforts to develop and deploy an effective anti-ballistic missile system. At the same time, they also intend to retain large and modernized ground and naval forces. In all these programs, the Soviets will be seeking a combination of forces which would permit them to undertake a pre-emptive attack on the US, should they conclude that a US attack was imminent, and to prosecute general war effectively if deterrence should fail.

✓ 18. The Soviet leaders are alert to search out areas where their military power can be brought into play to shield Communist efforts to advance by safer means, such as internal war in Southeast Asia or political blackmail in Berlin. We believe, however, that the USSR will wish to avoid involvement of its own forces in limited combat on the Bloc periphery and, if such conflict should occur, to minimize the chances of escalation to general war. Consequently, it would not in most circumstances take the initiative to expand the scope of such a conflict. The degree of Soviet commitment and the actual circumstances of the conflict would of course determine this decision. But we believe that, in general, the Soviet leaders would expand the scope of the conflict, even at greater risk of escalating to general war, only if a prospective defeat would, in their view, have grave political repercussions within the Bloc itself or constitute a major setback to the Soviet world position.

19. Within the limits set by these appraisals, the Soviet leaders have purposefully displayed both militancy and conciliation, at various times and in various proportions as seemed most profitable to them. Over the past year or so, however, the

pressure of the Chinese challenge has been one factor helping to keep the "hard" line in the foreground. The thrust of the XXII Congress in this respect was to reassert the USSR's insistence upon full tactical flexibility. Thus the USSR has not only continued its attacks on Chinese positions but has made some conciliatory moves, such as removal of the Berlin deadline, agreement on a disarmament forum, and publication of Adzhubey's interview with the President.

20. These measures have accompanied, not replaced, the harsher tactics which comprise the militant side of peaceful coexistence. At the same time Finland has been bullied; atomic tests have been resumed; Soviet military strength has been stressed; the Soviet position on Berlin remains highly demanding. The Congress attacks on the opponents of peaceful coexistence were meant only to make room for a full range of maneuver, not to seek a genuine accommodation with the West.

21. Currently, however, Soviet foreign policy is by no means completely freed of the pressures for more militancy which stem from the Chinese challenge. Should an open break occur, Moscow's initial reaction would probably be to emphasize "hard"

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tactics in order to justify tighter controls in Eastern Europe and to demonstrate that it was as vigorously anti-imperialist as its Chinese competitor. Over the long run, the consequences might be quite different; a protracted break might give important support to that tendency in Soviet foreign policy which seeks to put relations with the West on a more stable footing. It is conceivable that, faced with an actively hostile China whose strength was growing, the USSR might in time come to accept, at least tacitly, some mutual delimitation of aims with the West and thus some curb upon its expansionist impulse.

22. For the present, nevertheless, we conclude that the XXII Congress has initiated no marked departures in the foreign policies which have emerged under Khrushchev's leadership of the last five years. On Berlin, the USSR is presently in an interim phase, marking time in order to determine whether its earlier pressures will bring the West to the negotiating table with at least some concessions, or whether another round of threats, and perhaps even unilateral action, is required. Even a Sino-Soviet rupture would not be likely to alter the basic Soviet

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position on Berlin and Germany, since a major element in that position is the desire to stabilize the Soviet-controlled regime in East Germany and, by extension, those of Eastern Europe.

23. In the disarmament field, we perceive in recent Soviet moves no appreciable desire for agreements on terms which the West could regard as acceptable. Instead, the USSR continues to regard this as an arena for political struggle and, via maneuverings over parity and the composition of a forum, for enhancing Soviet stature and cultivating neutralist opinion. In addition to the theme of general and complete disarmament, the Soviets will probably also agitate such limited measures as regional schemes, agreements to limit the spread of nuclear weapons, and other proposals which might inhibit Western defense programs.

24. Sino-Soviet strains raise considerable uncertainties regarding prospective Soviet tactics in Southeast Asia. The USSR will probably continue to press cautiously its advantages in Laos and South Vietnam, seeking simultaneously to advance Communist prospects there, to avoid a major US intervention, and

to keep Chinese influence from becoming predominant. A further radical worsening of relations between Moscow and Peiping, however, could lead to a breakdown of Bloc cooperation in these ventures. In this event, Moscow would probably try to retain as much control as possible through the North Vietnamese regime, which, at least initially, would seek to preserve the Soviet connection as a counterweight to China.

25. In recent years the USSR has consistently looked upon the underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America as the prime targets for its tactics of peaceful coexistence. Beginning in about 1960, however, Soviet pronouncements have betrayed a sense of disappointment at the failure of some of the "older" neutrals, such as Nehru and Nasser, to move from the achievement of independence into a full association with Soviet policies and thence along the path toward Communist control. Nevertheless, the Soviet appraisal of its prospects in these areas remains highly optimistic. The USSR continues to believe that, by harnessing anti-Western and anticolonial sentiment, extending judicious offers of military and economic assistance, and sponsoring the political ambitions of new governments, it can make important gains in weakening Western positions and

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preparing the ground for further advances. The Soviets will not abandon those states which they have unsuccessfully sought to draw into a client relationship. But they will probably increasingly focus their main energies upon Africa and Latin America and, within these continents, upon the radical nationalist leaders who are most easily set against Western ties. Soviet activity in these areas will continue to conflict with, and normally to take priority over, any desire to adopt a conciliatory line toward the major Western powers.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



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